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Beloucif, Ahmed; Mehafdi, Messaoud; Komey, Naa Ayeley

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**Expectation as a Key Determinant of International Students'
Satisfaction: A Case Study Approach**

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Expectation as a Key Determinant of International Students’ Satisfaction:
A Case Study Approach

ABSTRACT

Purpose: *The study attempts to explore international postgraduate students (non-UK) expectations and their perceptions towards university service quality at one of Business Schools in Scotland. This paper presents the preliminary findings of a two stage study. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives were set: 1) to determine international students’ expectations of university education and, 2) to identify and assess the factors that influence student expectations and their significance in determining student satisfaction.*

Design/methodology/approach: *A qualitative inquiry has been adopted using 15 interviews with international postgraduate students. Based on a case study approach and thematic analysis, the study reveals three additional categories of international students’ expectations and two new emerging factors that influenced international students’ expectations.*

Findings: *It is found that international students have had high expectations of improved job prospects after graduation. This they say is highly influenced by the reputation of the school as having a high graduate employment rate. The most significant influence of international students’ expectations are found to be word-of mouth recommendations and students have had high expectations of the calibre of lecturers as well as facilities.*

Study implications: *No doubt, a student is seen as the most important customer of the university nowadays. The significance of this study can be seen from two perspectives. Theoretically, its findings contribute to a growing understanding of the body of literature by exploring the issues around international students’ expectations and meeting or exceeding those expectations. The service expectation, as a concept, leads to greater possibility of meeting or exceeding students’ expectations. Practically, Universities’ student recruitment and engagement services will benefit from the study and develop a tailored marketing strategy to manage international students’ expectations to ensure they are met or exceeded. These services have to take a cue and control the word of mouth relating to information given to prospective students in order to manage their expectations effectively.*

Key words: International students, students’ expectations, service quality and satisfaction.

Paper type: research paper.

INTRODUCTION

The services sector is a booming part of the UK economy: employing about 80.4% of the population (CIA Fact book 2012) and ranging from sophisticated financial services to educational services. In the UK, higher education is seen as being of key importance in the creation and transfer of knowledge to the economy through its teaching and learning, research and other activities. Universities are a significant part of the UK economy because, as the UK's economic competitiveness becomes increasingly dependent on leadership within knowledge-intensive industries, world-class research universities have a critically important role to play in driving future growth and prosperity (Russell Group 2010). In 2010-2011, Universities in the UK contributed about £3.3 billion to the economy through services to business, including commercialisation of new knowledge, delivery of professional training, consultancy and services (Universities UK, 2012).

Between 2005 and 2011, there has been an increase of about 9% in the number of students admitted into UK universities. Out of the 2,501,295 enrolled into UK universities in the 2010/2011 academic year about 298,110 are from non-UK and Non-European countries (HESA 2012). The 298,110 international students represent a significant 12% of students enrolled in UK Universities in the 2010/2011 academic year.

The core value provided by the service industry to consumers includes not only the uniqueness of tangible and intangible products, but also various factors involved in the process of service delivery to customers, such as physical facilities, company image, and quality of the service delivery. All these influence the expectations of the customer (Lin 2007). Therefore, there is the need for an empirical research into the formation of expectations of students. A rationale for this research can be identified in the literature gaps in previous academic writings.

Many studies have looked at the influencers of students' satisfaction and have come up with a number of elements. For instance, gender, temperament, preferred learning style, age gender, employment and grade point average have all been identified as significant predictors of student satisfaction (Stokes, 2001; Fredericksen et al 2000; Porter & Umbach 2001). Other studies have found institutional factors such as instructor teaching style, quality of instruction, research emphasis of the school, quality and promptness of feedback from instructor, clarity of expectations from instructor and class size (Chen & Hoshower 2010; Cardone-Riportella et al 2001; Fredericksen et al 2000; Porter & Umbach 2001; Grudnitski & Krentler 2004; Douglas et al 2006) as influencers of student satisfaction levels. And yet some literature has identified an integration of the two broad categories as crucial determinants of student satisfaction. For instance Desai et al (2001) identified student perception of instructor's fairness which is a combination of instructor actions and personal characteristics of the student, as a driver of student satisfaction.

However, students' expectations have been identified by only one satisfaction literature in the educational realm. Knapp and Krentler (2006) cited that student's expectations play a crucial role in ultimately understanding their satisfaction. Zeithmal and Bitner (2003) defined customer's expectations as:

"the reference points customers have coming in to a service experience: perceptions reflect the service as actually received" (p. 32).

In other words, customer's expectations are premeditated beliefs about a product or service that serve as standards for judging product performance or service quality. This implies that a customer's assessment of service quality results from a comparison of service expectations with actual performance. Therefore, a post purchase satisfaction is a function of the gaps between expectations and perceived performance. Most literature has identified that the idea here is for firms to close this gap between what is expected and what is received in order to satisfy their customers and build long term relationships (Zeithmal and Bitner 2003, Knapp and Krentler 2006, Voss et al. 2007).

If the services rendered by a university falls short of the expectations of students, the consumer, being the student, is disappointed: if it meets expectations the consumer is satisfied: yet if it exceeds expectations the consumer is delighted as Kotler and Keller (2012) put it. This study suggests a framework based on predictive expectations, which has been frequently used in customer satisfaction literature (Walker and Baker 2000; Bosque et al. 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Expectations

The exiting literature has attempted to explain the concept of service expectations with early writers elaborating on the definition and antecedents of service expectations (e.g. Gronroos 1984, Parasuraman et al 1985, Webster 1991, Zeithaml et al 1991 and Boulding et al 1993). However, most researchers seem to have concurred with Zeithaml et al's (1993) definition of customer expectations as:

"pretrial beliefs about a product that service as standards or reference points against which product performance is judged" (p. 1).

From this definition, one can deduce that customer' assessments of service quality result from a comparison of service expectations with actual product performance (Parasuraman et al 1985, Zeithaml et al 1993). According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) service expectations are:

"beliefs about service delivery that function as standards or reference points against which judgement is formed" (p. 60).

In other words, customer's expectations of services form the criteria for measuring their satisfaction levels of service delivery. If a marketer raises expectations too high, the buyer is likely to be disappointed. On the other hand if expectations are set too low, it won't attract enough buyers

(Kotler and Keller 2012). It is therefore important to have thorough knowledge about what the customer expects and design services in a way that meets or exceeds those expectations (Zeithaml and Bitner 2003, Dibb et al 2006). As Hamer et al (1999) rightly put it:

"The most important variable for managers to control is customer expectations" (p. 288).

Levels of customer service expectations

Zeithaml and Bitner (2003), identified five main levels of customer service expectations, ranging from as high as ideal expectations or desires to as low as minimum tolerable expectations.

The ideal level of expectations is the service level the customer hopes to receive or wishes to receive. It reflects the hopes and wishes of the customer (Zeithaml and Bitner 2003). However, this may not always be the case. The customer may recognise that his ideal expectations may not always be met hence settles for an acceptable level of performance which is termed adequate service level (Dibb et al 2006). The difference between these two levels of expectations is called the customer's zone of tolerance (Zeithaml and Bitner 2003, Dibb et al 2006).

The Zone of Tolerance

This expresses the extent to which customers recognise and are willing to accept variations from their desired service expectations and adequate service expectations. If service drops below adequate service (that is the minimum level of service expected), the customer then becomes frustrated and their satisfaction with the company will be undermined (Zeithaml et al 1993). The factors that influence the size of the tolerance zone include customer and service dimensions. These are the elements that cause the zone of tolerance to expand or contract (Zeithaml and Bitner 2003). Customers with narrower zones of tolerance require tighter range of service, whereas customers with wider zones of tolerance allow a greater range of service (Zeithaml and Bitner 2003). A customer's zone of tolerance may increase or decrease due to company-controlled factors including price. When price increases, customers tend to be less tolerant of poor service. In this case, the zone of tolerance decreases because the adequate service level shifts upward.

Factors influencing Customer Service Expectations

It has been established in literature that:

"the most important variable for managers to control is customer expectations" (Hamer et al. 1999 p. 288).

This is because it accounts for all the information present before, during and or after a service experience. With services, quality occurs during service delivery and consumers' expectations can change over the experience period. Given the evolving makeup of expectations, understanding the factors that influence the updating process is thus critical for marketing managers and researcher's alike (Boulding et al. 1993).

From a purely theoretical perspective, the guidelines for managing customer expectations have been ambiguous amongst academic researchers. This is suggesting that expectations be decreased (Davidow and Uttal 1989), increased (Boulding et al. 1993) or kept stable (Parasuraman et al. 1993). In spite of the obvious disparity in literature and calls for further research in the area (e.g. Parasuraman et al. 1993, Kalamas et al. 2002), very few studies have specifically looked at the determinants of service expectations.

To date, several scholars have developed and tested customer satisfaction models that integrate service expectations (Webster 1991; Parasuraman et al 1993; Clow et al 1998, Dion et al 1998; Kalamas et al 2002; Bosque et al. 2005). Each model is unique in terms of the identified antecedents for service expectations.

Zeithaml and her colleagues divided the antecedent of service expectations into four segments (i.e. expected, predicted, desired and adequate service). Zeithaml also identified antecedents under each segment even though not empirically tested in its entirety. Dion et al. (1998) attempted an empirical test on a more simplified version of the Zeithaml et al model and regarded service quality perceptions as antecedents of the degree of tolerance for service performance. Clow et al. (1998) also attempted to empirically test only the antecedents of predictive expectations in their model (i.e. advertising, implicit and explicit promise, word-of-mouth and past experience). However, whereas Clow and his colleagues treated service quality and satisfaction as distinct antecedents of expectations, Parasuraman et al. (1993) considered them as outcome variables.

Roblebo (2001) found that models that measure service quality considering expectations are superior to models that measure service quality as a function of performance only. After analysing data from a survey of customers of three commercial airlines with destinations of Spain, Majorca, Canary Islands , Germany and the UK, he found that service expectations were influenced by, word-of mouth communications, promotion, price, corporate image, personal needs and past experiences. Kalamas et al. (2002) presented a comprehensive conceptual framework for antecedents of should and will service expectations by dividing them in to five main segments: internal sources of information, external sources of information, personal needs and values, level of involvement and need for cognition. Their model was also tested empirically in the airline industry. Using both interviews and questionnaire, Voss et al. (2007) looked at the constructs underlying student's expectations of the teaching qualities of effective lecturers. They found that teaching skills, teaching methods, communication skills, approachability, enthusiasm, expertise, humour and friendliness were the most critical attributes students expect from lecturers and that the presence of these attributes in a lecturer contribute to fulfilling students goals of preparing themselves for their

profession. The study is explorative in nature and requires further empirical tests in different contexts.

Table.1: Customer service expectations (1984- 2002)

Research	Factors influencing customer expectations	Location
1. Gronroos C. (1984)	Firm image, word-of-mouth, tangibles, price, explicit service promises, adverts, past experience, satisfaction, service quality, personal needs and enduring service intensifiers.	Theoretical research
2. Webster J. (1991)	Word of mouth, opinion leadership, sales promotion, advertising and past experience	USA
3. Zeithaml, V, Berry L and Parasuraman, A. (1993)	word-of-mouth, tangibles, price, implicit service promises, adverts, past experience, third parties, transitory service intensifiers , perceived service alternatives , self –perceived service role , situational factors , personal needs and enduring service intensifiers.	USA
4. Clow K., Kurtz D and Orment J. (1997)	price, tangibles, product, image, implicit service promises, time, service quality, appearance of staff, word-of-mouth, past experience	USA
5. Dion, P., Rajshekhar J and Dilozenzo-Aiss, J. (1998)	Enduring service intensifiers, perceived Service alternatives, explicit and implicit service promises, word of mouth, past experience and transitory service intensifiers.	USA
6. Kalamas, M., Laroche, M and Cezard , A (2002)	word-of-mouth, tangibles, implicit service promises, adverts, effort, satisfaction, ease of recall, values, involvement, need for cognition, past experience and third parties,	CANADA

International students' expectations

Recalling Zeithaml and Bitner (2003), service expectations are defined as:

“ beliefs about service delivery that function as standards or reference points against which judgement is formed” (p. 60).

Specifically regarding student expectation, very few literatures have discussed student expectations as a determinant of student satisfaction.

In 1989, Dunkel and Davy found that there were significant differences between the expectations of American students and their international peers regarding notetaking. They found that most international students from the Far East, the Middle East and Latin America were not used to taking notes in English, but expected note-taking to be an important part of the teaching and learning process in the university.

East (2001) sought to determine the expectations and perceptions of international students in the La Trobe University in Australia. She found that international students anticipated that the teaching and learning style will be different from what they were used to with regards to more interactivity and take on more responsibility for their own learning. It was found that most respondents were disappointed with the lack of interaction with local students and students reported feeling excluded from class activities.

Niehoff et al (2001) found that Taiwanese students expected mandatory class attendance, theory and research based information in terms of learning processes and had low preferences for group activities in class. In 2002, Li et al discovered that Asian students in two New Zealand universities expected the learning process to involve knowledge transmission through textbooks. It was found that Asian students expected some level of focus with regards to lecture materials and sometimes found course materials too general and too loose. They expected to improve their English and cultural knowledge rather than contribute ideas and solve problems through group work. Some also expected certain courses to be easy because of the course name. They expected one definite answer to questions and standardised tests.

Sherry et al (2003) discovered that international students have certain expectations of what they think a tertiary institution should fulfil such as good learning support services, high quality teaching, good staff-student communications, prompt feedback from tutors and high levels of responsiveness and empathy in terms of service quality.

At the Sheffield Hallam University in England, Tricker (2005), postulated that international student expectations are high and they include: flexibility and choice in the delivery of education, access to cutting edge technology, a two way communication process between themselves and with the university, consultation about the learning experience, accurate information about courses, assessment procedures, complaints process, etc., honesty with respect to whether their needs can be met or not, quality and professionalism in the provision of services, access to suitably qualified teachers and appropriate learning support, value of study to career prospects.

In 2005, Dalgish and Chan, sought to determine the differing expectations of students from different geographical regions in the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in New Zealand. They discovered that Indian students chose the QUT because it was more affordable compared with other options. Recommendations from agents, location in Brisbane, the reputation of the institution and fast offer played significant roles in students' choice. It was found that African students expected a totally Australian experience but felt that having other international students were a bonus. Also, Thai students had great expectations of the social facilities that would be available. Indian students expected a more directed learning regime. Ransom et al (2006) found that international students with English as a second language in the University of Melbourne expect to improve their English proficiency. Generally, these students expected their results to be in the top one-third of their class and high institutional support to improve upon their English proficiency. In 2006, Ahmad embarked on research into the Indian students expectations of the University of Melbourne. The ranking and reputation of the university were ranked top influencing factors in their choice of university. Majority of respondents expected their course to involve a lot of hard work and be challenging. They

also expected high standard and a lot of interactivity in class. Additionally, participants expected their course to offer them more industry exposure which would make them work-ready upon graduation. These respondents expected their course to offer them in-depth knowledge of the subject and involve a lot of practical training. Indian students expected their lecturers to have in-depth knowledge of their fields and possess the ability to make the class interesting and intellectually stimulating. Most participants expected student life to be fun. Most post graduate respondents expected their classmates to be of the same calibre in terms of work experience. Intelligence, smartness and maturity were some of the other qualities students expected to see in their classmates. On-campus facilities were expected to be of high quality.

In 2008, Kingston and Forland discovered that East-Asian students in a London university the expected teaching methods to inculcate their personal opinions. These international students also had language difficulties that made note-taking and assessments (particularly examinations), challenging.

Zhang and Zhou (2010), aimed at ascertaining the perspective, expectations and experiences of international students in university of Windsor, Canada. They discovered that friendship with native English speakers was a significant factor for Chinese students' satisfaction with their studying experience at the university. Those Chinese students who made friends with native English speakers tend to be more satisfied with their study experience and had a higher level of confidence to successfully complete their programs. With regards to reasons for choosing the university, majority of Chinese international students chose the University of Windsor because their high schools have a relationship with the university. Also, most of the students faced challenges with getting used to the public transportation system in Canada, finding directions on campus initially and the food served on campus. Moreover, culture shock was a major challenge for the Chinese students with regards to conversation topics with new friends and residential life. Furthermore, the participants described their experience as boring. Academically, most of the Chinese students found it difficult to communicate with instructors and peers in class. Most also found it difficult to write papers especially for those enrolled in humanities or social science programs. In terms of social life, most thought they would make a lot of Canadian friends easily but found it very hard because of cultural differences. In a nut shell Zhang and Zhou (2010) concluded that learning differences was the most important element in determining the kind of experience international Chinese students had in the University of Windsor.

In 1999, Byon et al found that Korean international students in the University of Wisconsin in the United States had low expectations on the attractiveness of counselling programs in the university. They expected to discuss their problems with their peers and would drop out of counselling sessions

quickly if the process was unpleasant or did not seem immediately helpful. The Korean students expected to approach counselling as a classroom learning situation in which they could present problems, ask questions about the problems, and work on assignments to solve the problems. This supports findings by Yoon and Jepsen (2008) indicating that Asian international students, in comparison with U.S. students, indicated less exposure to counselling, less self-perceived need for counselling, greater discomfort/shame with counselling, less openness to counselling, a greater preference for a directive style, and a greater preference for a flexible counselling format. Moreover, language and cultural concerns were barriers to seeking counselling. The subsequent table summarises literature on expectations of international students.

Table.2: International Students’ Expectations

Research	Factors international students expectations	Geographical location
1. Patricia Dunkel, Sheryl Davy (1989)	Increased note taking	America
2. Juliane East (2001)	More interactive teaching and learning style, more responsibility for independent learning, organised lecturers and handouts.	Australia
3. Brian Niehoff , William Turnley, Hsui Ju Rebecca Yen, Chwen Sheu (2001)	Mandatory class attendance, theory and research based teaching and learning, low group activities.	America
4. Minsheng Li, Trish Baker, Ken Marshall (2002)	Knowledge transmission through textbooks, focused teaching and learning materials, improvement in English proficiency, one answer questions, standardised tests.	New Zealand
5. Carol Sherry, Ravi Bhat, Bob Beaver, Anthony Ling (2003)	Good learning support services, high quality teaching, good staff-student communications, prompt feedback, high levels of responsiveness and empathy	New Zealand
6. Tony Tricker (2005)	Flexibility and choice in the delivery of education, access to cutting edge technology , a two way communication process between themselves and with the university, to be consulted about the learning experience, accurate information about their courses, assessment procedures, complaints process, etc , honesty with respect to whether their needs can be met or not, quality and professionalism in the provision of services, access to suitably qualified teachers and appropriate learning support, value of study to career prospects .	UK
7. Carol Daglish and Annie Chan (2005)	A totally Australian experience, good social facilities, directed learning regime	Australia
8. Laurie Ransom, Wendy Larcombe, Chi Baik (2006)	Improvement in English proficiency, top one-third grades, high institutional support	Australia
9. Sameena Ahmad (2006)	Independent hard work, high standard of teaching, more interactivity in class, more industry exposure, in-depth knowledge of subject, practical training, lectures skilled in	Australia

	making classes interesting and intellectually stimulating, knowledgeable lecturers, intelligence in classmates, high quality on-campus facilities.	
10. Emma Kingston and Heather Forland (2006)	Interactive teaching methods, note-taking	UK
11. Eunju Yoon and David Jepsen (2008)	Unattractive counselling format, more directed study	USA
12. Zuochen Zhang and Goerge Zhou (2010)	Making new friends, different learning methods.	Canada

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study is to investigate the expectations of international students in one of the Scottish higher education using one Business School in the North East as the focal point. The term 'International and/or overseas students' in this paper refers to students with non-UK nationality.

In choosing semi-structured interview as is advocated by Saunders et al (2009), the exploratory nature of this research is taken into account. It is believed an interview with some degree of focus was appropriate for the purpose of the qualitative phase as it let respondents describe freely the reason behinds their behaviours and perceptions of their environment while maintaining a sense of direction of the research. Fifteen interviews were carried out on a 'one-to-one basis' with 15 students chosen at random by the researcher from the pool of international postgraduate students studying at one Scottish Business school. The interviews lasted for an average of about 30-50 minutes. All participants in this study were "international" postgraduate students. It is intended to validate factors identified in literature and also to identify emerging factors from the fieldwork. Through the thematic analysis, the study used mainly verbatim quotes by the interviewees to categorise their responses under the key categories/themes.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Components of international postgraduate students' expectations

Most of the elements identified in literature on the expectations of international students concerning the course content were confirmed in the interviews. Respondents expected to be assessed through examinations (Dunkel and Davy 1989, Ahmad 2006). However, they did not expect other factors such as theory based teaching and learning (Niehoff et al 2001). On the contrary they expected more practical training as one respondent studying Project management at the masters level confirms.

"...Because the course is accredited by PMI I thought the course would be more practical than it really is. I studied project management as a provisional certificate before coming here so I thought I would get some practical skills in project management as well..."

This study also discovered that some respondents expected a fairly more manageable course curriculum as is compared to their undergraduate education. Moreover, fewer respondents particularly those from Africa expected a higher level of independent learning. In addition to well organised lecturers, more practical training and examinations, most respondents expect their course content to increase their future career options. One respondent studying MSc Purchasing and Supply Management presented it:

"Postgraduation... I am proposing to work in a very good organisation...probably rise to manager or director level...after getting what I intend to get here".

Most respondents also had high expectations of the qualification and ability of their lecturers to transfer knowledge in an interesting way (Tricker 2005, Sherry et al 2003). With regards to social life, the interviews revealed that international postgraduate students, expected to make many friends and to improve upon their English proficiency by making friends with locals. In addition to that, most respondents also expected an entertaining student social life, difficulty in understanding the Scottish accent, a culture shock and to make friend from varied international backgrounds.

International students also expected to have highly intelligent classmates (Ahmad 2006). However, in addition to that, most respondents did not expect to see classmates from such varied academic and career backgrounds. Moreover, the respondents expected to have classmates from different geographical backgrounds.

The interviews revealed that most of the respondents do not expect high quality facilities. In fact they seemed pleasantly surprised at the accessibility and quality of facilities in the school. The study found that these low expectations in facilities were influenced by the low quality of facilities most respondents had to deal with during their undergraduate education. On the other hand, other respondents expected to see such good facilities since the university is known to be the best modern university in the UK. In addition to that, respondents also expected to have a conducive environment for learning and a much larger campus than was discovered upon arrival.

Contrary to previous studies (East 2001 , Li et al 2002), most respondents expected to have very formal relationships with lecturers where communication was not very frequent. Moreover, the interviews revealed that international students do expect a more directed learning regime. Other respondents expected less interactivity in classes and the use of contemporary methods of teaching. As one respondent stated:

"...I thought lecturer student relationship will be very formal like it is at home... And what i admire is that the lecturers come down to student level more or less the same level even though they have a higher qualification...You know...they still come down to our level and interact with us...you can even call them by their first names."

The interview findings also identified other expectations that cannot be categories under any of the headings or themes such as the possibility of employment after graduation.

This study discovered that most respondents expect to get a strong foundation for great careers as is promised by the school. Others also expected to get employed in good companies and particularly in the oil and gas industry upon graduation. An International Business student expresses that:

“being located in the energy capital of Europe and all, I pretty much thought it would be easier getting recruited into the oil and gas industry but I have found recruitment is pretty much the same. It is just as tough and nothing easier.”

Given the location of the school in the northern part of the UK which is a temperate region, and the fact that most of the international student population are from Africa and Asia which have more tropical climate, the issue of weather emerged from the interviews. Most respondents said they did not expect the weather to be as bad. In spite of the fact that generally most of the respondents had some pre-meditated ideas before arriving at the school, there were still some who claimed to have no expectations prior to their arrival.

By examining qualitative results, it is clear that that studying abroad was viewed by international students as a long term investment with expected high returns in terms of the career benefits that they believe foreign degrees will provide to them. As one respondent from International Business course explained:

“When I finished my first degree, it wasn’t so good. And my friends were coming here to study and getting good jobs afterwards so I thought this would be a good place to learn so that I too can get a good job afterwards.”

Table 3: International students’ expectations

Factors confirmed by interview findings	
Course content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased notetaking decreased responsibility for independent learning theory based teaching and learning assessment of students by examinations well organised lectures and handouts, knowledge transmission through textbooks top one-third grades more industry exposure more practical training 	Teaching staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> highly qualified and professional lecturers lecturers skilled in making the class interesting and intellectually stimulating Lecturers who were highly knowledgeable in their fields. Lecturers with work experience Lecturers with good teaching ability
Social life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To make many friends Improve upon English proficiency Learn from different people Have an entertaining social life 	Classmates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly intelligent class mates Few group activities Classmates who have business backgrounds Classmates who have work experience
Facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cutting edge technology appropriate learning support materials 	Student-lecturer relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal relationships with lecturers easy access to suitably qualified lecturers

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• good handouts• good social facilities• high quality on-campus facilities• a conducive environment for studying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• prompt feedback from lecturers on course works• high levels of empathy from lecturers
Teaching style <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Directed learning regime• More interactive style of teaching• More group activities• More practical training	
Key Emerging factors	
Employability <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased job prospects• Skills to do well in career• Skills to run one own business	Weather (Climate) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less cold and windy climate No expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No idea what to expect (unknown)

Influencers of international postgraduate students’ expectations

The literature review revealed a number of factors that influences a customer’s expectations prior to experiencing a service. These factors include: word of mouth, university/school image, tangibles, past experiences, advertising, implicit and explicit service promise, personal needs, recommendations, location and appearance of staff (Gronroos 1984, Webster 1991, Zeithaml et al 1993). In line with what has been discovered in previous studies, the interview findings reveal that international students’ expectations were largely influenced by word of mouth.

Respondents also acknowledged the influence the school’s reputation had in shaping their expectations. Others spoke about their past experiences as levelling their expectations. The website of the school also frequently came up as a powerful advertising tool in shaping the expectations of respondents. Recommendations from other people also led some respondents to have high expectations of the business school/university.

Interestingly, the study found that one major factor that influenced the expectations of particularly respondents from Africa was the economic standing of their country of origin as compared with that of the UK.

Additionally, the study identified one respondent who expressed his personality as the most influential in shaping his expectations. In a nutshell, the researcher found that most of the factors identified in literature as influencing a customer’s expectations of a service were confirmed by findings from the interviews and some other factors were identified as well.

Table.3: Key Factors influencing international students’ expectations

Factors confirmed by interview findings	Emerging factors from interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Word of mouth• University/school image• Tangibles• Past experiences• Advertising• Implicit and explicit service promises• Personal needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Country of origin (degree)• Personality traits

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations • Location • Appearance of staff | |
|--|--|

CONCLUSION

"The Student is the most important customer of the university." (Maringe and Gibb 2009, p.163).

The significance of this study can be seen from two viewpoints: theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, findings of this paper contribute to a growing understanding of the international postgraduate student expectations. Traditionally literature has concentrated on identifying the components of international postgraduate student's expectation and the factors influencing those expectations. Consequently, this study attempts to fill a vital gap in the body of the literature by exploring the issues around international students expectations and the meeting or exceeding of those expectations. Therefore, the results from this study can be added to the existing literature.

Practically, investigating the students' expectations can provide valuable information for university marketers to develop marketing strategies. In order to ensure students are satisfied with services rendered, the RGU-ABS could use findings from this study to manage international students' expectations to ensure they are met or exceeded.

Finally, it is important to note that what students appear to have in common are the high expectation and the emotional value they attach to their postgraduate qualifications. In spite of the fact that most respondents expressed satisfaction with their expectations, some international students were not fulfilled when they faced difficulties in finding jobs in the host country. This study highlights the need for an investigation into international students' levels of satisfaction, particularly regarding employment opportunities. Additionally, an empirical and comparative analysis of international students' expectations will provide extra understanding of the subject. Further research on these topics would certainly add knowledge about the international students market in UK.

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